

STEVEN SIEGELAUB
150 Wildrose Road
Orange, CT 06477

**Appropriations Committee Public Hearing on Proposed FY 23 Adjustments
for Human Services Agencies**

Feb 24, 2022

2:00 PM

To the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak at this hearing. My name is Steven Siegelau. I live in Orange. I grew up in Connecticut and I attended college, work and raised a family here. I have a daughter Tracy who is now 34 years old and was born with significant neurological impairments which deprive her of the ability to take care of her basic needs without assistance.

When Tracy aged out of the public special education program at 18 years old, my wife and I searched for a program that would allow her to live outside our home with the necessary support and achieve a dignified life to the extent of her capabilities. We were introduced to Vista Life Innovations, a non-profit organization based in Madison that provides support services for over 250 adults with disabilities.

Tracy has been a successful member of the Vista program for fifteen years. She lives alone in a one-bedroom apartment in Westbrook. The Connecticut Department of Developmental Services (DDS) finances (through the Medicaid waiver) the two key elements of Tracy's support structure through Vista: a day program and what is referred to as IHS (in-home supports). The IHS services (which occur in Tracy's apartment and in the community) are critical for Tracy's ability to live in a less restrictive setting than a DDS supported group home. The IHS services are provided by Vista hourly wage staff called Life Skills Instructors. These instructors help Tracy shop for and prepare food, schedule and attend medical and dental appointments, shop for necessities such as clothing and hygiene supplies, participate in recreational activities and otherwise obtain and attend to all the necessities of life, as Tracy is not capable of doing any of these tasks independently.

The IHS services provided by Vista have allowed Tracy to live a dignified life. She has many friends within the Vista program and is proud of her participation in many activities of the Vista community. These IHS services also assure that Tracy will have a stable support structure independent of her aging parents.

Unfortunately, the continuation of these DDS funded IHS services provided by Vista to Tracy and approximately 60 other special needs adults in the Vista program are under grave threat. The problem is simple: the DDS only pays a reimbursement rate to Vista of \$34.00 per hour for IHS services, but it costs Vista approximately \$52.00 per hour to provide these services. The reimbursement rate has increased very little for many years and has not tracked inflation and

State mandated wage increases. As a result, Vista has been providing these services at a substantial loss for years.

I have been a member of Vista's Board of Directors for the past eight years, so I am very familiar with the hemorrhage of money that continuing to provide IHS services to DDS supported members has cost Vista. The situation has reached a crisis where Vista will not remain financially viable and will be forced to terminate DDS funded IHS services soon if the reimbursement rate isn't increased to the actual cost of providing the services. I have been advised that other non-profit organizations in Connecticut have ceased providing IHS services for the same reason.

It is difficult for me to remain unemotional and describe the trauma that will be caused for the DDS supported Vista members and their families if Vista is forced to terminate IHS services for these 60 Vista members, many of whom have been in the program for 10-20 years and who have developed a stable and fulfilling life within the community of Vista members and the larger communities in which they live. Their lives will be torn apart, and I believe that the only alternative will be for DDS to provide group home settings for many of them, including my daughter. I understand that a group home placement would cost approximately 200% or more of what continuing the IHS supports at an appropriate reimbursement rate would cost the State. Why would the State want to spend more money for less appropriate services? A group home setting also cuts directly against the policy goal of providing the least restrictive environment for members of the special needs community. This situation is particularly difficult to understand, given that the DDS already pays a reimbursement rate of over \$50.00 per hour to Vista for comparable employment related support services that Vista hourly wage staff provides to its members.

I urge you to support a wage hike to \$52.00 per hour for DDS funded IHS services, to take effect at the beginning of the new fiscal year on July 1, 2022. Only such a prompt rate hike will allow Vista to continue to provide these critical support services to DDS funded members and prevent a terrible and traumatic disruption of their lives.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely, Steven Siegelau